



IDSS COMMENTARIES

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MEGAWATI'S RE-ELECTION IN 2004
NOT A SURE BET

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Misleading Media Analysis

During and after the recently concluded Annual Session of the MPR (People's Consultative Assembly), Indonesia's highest state body, the regional media, have forecast the high possibility of Megawati's reelection in 2004. One observer even predicted that it was "almost a certainty that she (Megawati) will be re-elected in 2004."² Such an assertion may not portray the reality correctly and therefore can be misleading.

The media appeared to rely on three assumptions whose validity can be questioned. First, the secular nationalist Megawati will prevail in a direct presidential election. Second, a recently conducted poll suggested that the Indonesian electorate rejected an Islamic leadership for the country and thus put Megawati as a front-runner in the presidential bid, especially if paired up with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as vice-presidential candidate. And third, the triumphalist feeling that came with the failure of the bid to introduce Islamic *Shariah* into the constitution during the recent MPR Annual Session.

Questioning the Possible Repeat of 1999 Experience

The first assumption was based on the experience of the 1999 presidential election by the MPR. The PDI-P, Megawati's party, received the highest vote in the general election, but was denied the presidency by a coalition of Islamic parties and Golkar, which then backed Abdurrahman Wahid. It is important to note, however, that the situation has changed from 1999. The votes that went to PDI-P in 1999 came largely from the lower and middle classes, who either saw Megawati in the light of her late father's rhetoric of Indonesian socialism or viewed her as a "martyr" during the fight against Suharto's New Order regime. After assuming the presidency following the impeachment of Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati revealed her true colours as a conservative Javanese leader, and who like her father, has a strong autocratic tendency.

This was apparent, among other things, from her support for Sutiyoso for the post of Jakarta governor. Sutiyoso was the TNI officer allegedly most responsible for the attack on PDI headquarters on 27 July 1996. The incident ironically marked the turning point in Megawati's political career. Another instance was the movement to block the constitutional amendment during the recent MPR Annual Session, which was made up

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² "Win, win for Megawati," Asia Section, *The Straits Times*, Monday, 12 August 2002.

largely of PDI-P members of the MPR, including Megawati's husband, Taufik Kiemas. While Megawati never openly supported such a move, it was reported that she privately condoned it. The PDI-P initially also voiced reluctance to have the president and vice president elected directly by the people, citing the reason that the people might not be ready for it. Additionally, Megawati's administration has not made any meaningful inroad in the fight against corruption, collusion, and cronyism in the government. PDI-P's lack of support for the formation of a parliamentary special commission, which would look into allegations of corruption against the speaker of parliament, Akbar Tanjung from Golkar, also reflected PDI-P's conservatism.

Such conservatism tends to alienate Megawati's own constituents, i.e., NGO activists and lower and middle classes. Unless Megawati and the PDI-P are able to shed such an image prior to the election, it is quite likely that they will lose their traditional constituents.

Questioning the Popularity Poll

The poll conducted by the Jakarta-based Centre for Political Studies (CPS) involving some 4,000 respondents in five major urban areas in Indonesia, suggested that Megawati is still the leading people's choice, leaving behind prospective contenders with some Islamic credentials, such as Amien Rais, Hamzah Haz, or Akbar Tanjung. Based on this finding, some regional media went on to suggest that this indicated a rejection of Islamic leadership by the people.³

However, the contrary could be true. If anything, this poll actually suggested that Megawati's rivals have closed the gap in the popularity poll. While still ahead in the poll, support for Megawati pairing up with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was a mere 15.5 percent. This indicated a sharp drop, keeping in mind that the PDI-P garnered more than 30 percent of the votes during the last election. On the other hand, while still lagging behind, support for the Islamic pair of Amien Rais and Yusril Ihza Mahendra was 11.5 percent. In the 1999 election, Amien's party, PAN, received only around 7 percent of the votes, while Yusril's PBB a mere 3 percent.

In fact, in other polls, Megawati's popularity seemed to have taken a nose-dive. In the polls conducted by some Indonesian media, such as the Media Indonesia and Detikcom, her popularity rating was only an average of 30 percent. If these polls are credible, then some 70 percent of Indonesians think that Megawati has not done a good job.

But perhaps the most significant indication of the CPS poll was the fact that the public is still in a wait-and-see mode. A significant 28 percent of those polled did not state any preference for any of the presidential/vice-presidential candidates. And while the PDI-P remained at the top with 29.4 percent, those who did not state any party preference was a close second at 27 percent. The playing field is still wide open and the electorate is still very much a swinging and floating one.

³ "'No' to Islamic Leadership," Prime News Section, The Straits Times, 31 July 2002.

Questioning the Defeat of the Islamists

The failure of some Islamic-based parties to push for the re-insertion of the Jakarta Charter (that would require the state to oversee the implementation of Islamic *Shariah* for Indonesian Muslims) into the Constitution during the MPR Annual Session is viewed by some as a triumph for secular-nationalist forces, of which Megawati is the foremost figure.

But the reality is that there was little debate over the issue during the MPR Session and the defeat of the proponents of the Jakarta Charter had been a foregone conclusion, even before the Session started. The opposition from Indonesia's two largest Islamic organisations, the Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah constituted a serious obstacle for the Jakarta Charter proponents.

Additionally, the current open political system, which ironically many analysts perceive as responsible for the resurgence of the Islamic state idea, is the primary cause behind the rejection of such an idea. In the open political system, moderation, negotiation, and bargaining are the norms. There is no place for extreme political agenda. Political decisions are arrived at through a process of dialogue, in which all parties give and take. Hence, it has been an open secret for quite some time, especially among the political players in Jakarta, that the idea of an Islamic state would not be supported and would not be pushed. But the Islamic-based political parties asked to be allowed to maintain their position in public, so as not to alienate their constituents.

If anything, the MPR Annual Session even provided the avenue for these Islamic parties to come out of this political process untainted by accusations of horse-trading. During the proceedings on the last day of the session, these parties asked for an opportunity to declare their supposedly firm support for the Jakarta Charter, and to dissociate themselves from the decision to reject the Charter's re-insertion in the Constitution. By doing so, they hope to maintain their credibility in the eyes of their constituents, while at the same time moderating their position *vis a vis* the other parties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Megawati's re-election is not yet a certainty. Even with a direct presidential election system slated for 2004, it is still anyone's ball game. The image of Megawati as a martyr in the fight against the authoritarian New Order and as a symbol of *Reformasi* has largely diminished due to her conservative presidency. If this pattern of her presidency continues, it is quite probable that in the 2004 election she would lose a significant portion of her lower and middle classes constituents, which voted overwhelmingly for her in 1999.

While Megawati is still ahead in some popularity polls, her overwhelming lead has been reduced quite significantly. At the same time, the popularity of some of her political rivals, most notably Amien Rais, has increased. If there is no significant improvement in her image, this trend could continue up to the run-up to the 2004 election.

The failure of the bid for the re-insertion of the Jakarta Charter into the Constitution is not so much due to the strength and will of the secular nationalist forces, both civilian and military, as it is because of the opposition from mainstream Muslim

groups. Its failure was also the product of the open political system that Indonesia now has, which necessitates moderation of extreme positions.

Related to the above, the perception that support for the TNI (Indonesian military) must be rendered because it is the bulwark of secularism can be counter-productive, as such a perception is highly unpopular in Indonesia. Secularism will be best maintained through the democratic consolidation process and support for the mainstream Muslim groups, such as the Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah.

It is crucial for Indonesia's friends and neighbours to be even-handed in relating to the various political factions in Indonesia. Power after the 2004 election could still go in any direction. It is imperative, therefore, to establish and maintain good rapport not just with the secular-nationalists but also with the Islamic-based parties. By engaging the Muslim forces constructively, the moderation process will also be further enhanced.